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AUTHOR Dwyer, Edward J.; Summy, Mary K.
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ABSTRACT

To examine characteristics of subjects relative to their attitudes toward censorship, a study surveyed 98 college students selected from students in a public university in the southeastern United States. A 24-item Likert-style censorship scale was used to measure attitudes toward censorship. Strong agreement with affirmative items would suggest that a respondent was pro-censorship; the reverse was true for the negatively directed items. After completing the censorship scale, subjects were tested on the vocabulary subtest of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test, a 100-item multiple-choice test designed to yield a raw score indicating vocabulary knowledge. Following the vocabulary measure, subjects were tested with two separately administered cloze tests. The first cloze test was constructed from a newspaper article strongly opposing censorship, while the second cloze test used an article strongly favoring censorship. Findings suggested that individuals with weaker vocabularies tended to have more favorable attitudes toward censorship than their counterparts with stronger vocabularies. Yet, comprehension as measured by the cloze tests suggested that attitude toward censorship had no effect on performance. (Two tables of data are included, and a list of the censorship scale items and 11 references are appended.) (MM)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES TOWARD CENSORSHIP AND SELECTED ACADEMIC VARIABLES

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Edward J. Dwyer and Mary K. Summy

Naylor (1986) determined that efforts to censor printed material in both schools and libraries have increased dramatically in the seventies and eighties. She concluded that such efforts are spreading like "prairie fire" (p. 616). Naylor's contention is indeed confirmed by examination of an extensive review of literature undertaken by Busha (1982). Busha listed 94 references dealing with censorship, nearly all published since 1970. However, a comprehensive review of literature concerning censorship undertaken in preparation for this study revealed virtually no empirical evidence relative to attitudes toward censorship among people in the general population. On the other hand, writers generally categorize censorship advocates in terms similar to those attributed to censors by Jennison (1964):

> No scientifically precise psychological profile has ever been drawn of the typical censor, but if one were, it would reveal almost equal strains of fear, insecurity, ignorance, and arrogance. The censor is prey to the disease of bibliophobia: he is afraid of books and fearful of their corrupting influence upon those more impressionable than he (pp. 58-59).

A substantial amount of material exists concerning philosophical, legal, Constitutional, ethical, religious, and moral arguments and implications concerning censorship. The purpose of this study, however, is to go beyond adding to the philosophically oriented prose relative to censorship by examining the relationship of selected academic competencies and attitudes toward censorship in individuals.

The desire of individuals to censor materials appears to stem from a contention that such materials are harmful to the moral climate of the community or, in particular, children in schools where these materials might be located. Censors usually advocate that materials found offensive to their own belief systems are inherently harmful and, consequently, should be kept from others through various types of controls.

Comprehension and Bias

Though not directly related to censorship, several researchers have examined the effects of personal beliefs on comprehension of materials read. Read and Rosson (1982) and Apiro (1977) undertook studies designed to determine the relationship between attitudes related to particular topics and comprehension of articles read concerning those topics. These researchers concluded that initial comprehension was unaffected by bias. In other words, subjects initially comprehended materials with which they disagreed just as well as they comprehended material they supported.

In a similar vein, Sheppard (1980) used video tapes of a mock trial followed shortly by a series of written comprehension questions. Subjects recalled information equally well whether the information was consistent with their expressed attitudes or not. Sheppard also concluded that immediate recall of information appears to be unaffected by biases. However, when the researchers in the three studies cited above evaluated recall of information after delays of several days and longer, all reported that recall of information was substantially modified in the direction of preconceived attitudes as new information became more fully integrated with the old. Read and Rosson classified this phenomenon as "belief consistent" behavior. That is, subjects recalled some information inaccurately but those inaccuracies were consistent with their preconceived biases.

Matthewson (1985) developed an affective model of reading proposing that each of the following modes of response influences the reading process: attitude, motivation, affect, and physical feelings. In this light, Matthewson suggested that a favorable attitude in the reader toward the contents of a particular message "should give rise to heightened attention and comprehension of the reading material. In addition, favorable attitude should stimulate greater recall, reflection, and application" (p. 851).

While Matthewson did not address censorship per se, his theory makes plausible the contention that readers who favor censorship are likely to more attentively read material supporting that point of view and vice versa.

Focus

The purpose of the present study was to examine characteristics of subjects relative to their attitudes toward censorship. In this light, answers were sought for the following questions: 1) What is the relationship between attitudes toward censorship and acquired vocabulary? 2) Do subjects favoring censorship comprehend material supporting censorship better than they comprehend material opposing censorship? 3) Do individuals who are opposed to censorship find it easier to comprehend material supporting their viewpoint? 4) Do males and females differ in their attitudes toward censorship?

Method

A sample of 98 college students was selected from among students in a public university in the southeastern United States. There were 30 freshmen, 27 sophomores, 16 juniors, eight seniors, and 17 graduate students. The freshmen and sophomores were nearly evenly divided among male and female students but the juniors, seniors, and graduate students were predominatly female. The upper class students were all education majors, thus the high proportion of females.

The principal measure used was a 24 item Leikert style censorship scale developed for this study. Approximately half the items were stated affirmatively while the other half were negatively directed. Of the affirmative items, strong agreement would suggest that a respondent was pro-censorship while the other half suggested an anti-censorship position. The same

balance held true for the negatively directed items. This practice avoided the likelihood of respondents getting into a predictable response pattern based on the design of the answer sheet.

A maximum score of 96 was possible on the censorship scale. The scoring range (1-4) was reversed for statements on the scale that opposed censorship. Thus, a "disagree strongly" response to an anti-censorship item would be counted as a four point response and, thus, add four points to the censorship score. The scoring categories for each were as follows:

4 = agree strongly
3 = agree
2 = disagree
1 = disagree strongly

The censorship scale was scored so that the level at which each subject favored censorship could be quantitatively determined. Originally there were 25 items but one was eliminated (item 22) when reliability of that item was deemed insufficient. Thus, a subject totally favoring the pro-censorship point of view on each item would end up with a score of 96. The censorship scale is presented in Appendix A. This is a scaled down format designed to save space in publication.

Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was applied to the 24 item scale yielding a coefficient of .79 suggesting adequate reliability. Validity was determined through examination of the items by several individuals judged qualified to evaluate the instrument.

After completing the censorship scale, subjects were tested on the vocabulary subtest of the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (1973). This is a 10 minute, 100 item, multiple-choice test designed to yield a raw score indicating vocabulary knowledge.

Following the vocabulary measure, subjects were tested with two separately administered tests titled Cloze I (Herman, 1984) and Cloze II (Todd, 1984). Both Cloze I and Cloze II were designed to adhere to traditional cloze design: the first and last sentences were left intact with every fifth word randomly deleted throughout the remainder of each article used. Cloze I was made using an entire newspaper article strongly opposing censorship while Cloze II was made using an entire article strongly favoring censorship. The number of deletions is unequal for Cloze I (55) and Cloze II (76) due to the length of each article. Further, application of the Fry (1977) and Flesch (1948) readability formulas suggested unequal levels of difficulty. This information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Data on

Cloze I and Cloze II

	Deletions	Fry Level	Flesch Score
Cloze I	55	17+ Grd. Equiv	7 very difficult
Cloze II	76	16 Grd. Equiv	41 difficult

The cloze tests were administered alternately so that approximately half the subjects took each measure first. The numbers were not precisely even because data for several subjects were eliminated because of missing information.

The entire testing block took about 45 minutes although a definite time limit was set only for the vocabulary measure. Data were then treated statistically.

Findings

Subjects produced a mean score on the censorship scale of 53.6 with a median of 55, mode of 57 (n=10), and standard deviation of 8. Scores ranged from a low of 32 (n=2) to a high of 76 (n=1) producing a variance of 64. Mean scores of males and females were nearly identical: males 53.5; females 53.7.

Further, analysis of variance of attitude scale scores based on college class produced no significant differences (f=.11). Means ranged from a low of 47.5 for seniors (n=8) through a high of 56.5 (n=17) for graduate students. On the other hand, females scored significantly higher than males on all measures other than the scale measuring attitudes toward censorship. This isn't the least bit surprising since the female students in the sample were largely upper class while the opposite is true for the 33 males.

Pierson product-moment correlations were obtained. A significant negative ($<.05$) relationship between the attitude scale and performance on the Nelson-Denny Vocabulary subtest was found. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between the attitude scale and either of the cloze measures. In other words, the personal beliefs of subjects toward censorship apparently did not affect performance on the cloze measures. Not surprisingly, correlations between both cloze measures and the Nelson-Denny were significant ($<.01$). A summary of correlations is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Correlations

	Attitude	ND Vocabulary	Cloze I
ND Vocabulary	-.21**		
Cloze I	-.05	-.62*	
Cloze II	-.15	1.59*	.61*

Significant: **<.05 *<.01

The Nelson-Denny yielded a raw score of 39.4 with a standard deviation of 13.5, a median of 36, and mode of 33.

Cloze I, the anti-censorship article, yielded a mean of 16 correct (29 percent) with a standard deviation of 6.8, a median of 16, and a mode of 14.

Cloze II, the pro-censorship article, yielded a mean of 26.6 correct (34 percent), a standard deviation of 8.6, a median of 27, and a mode of 28.

Discussion

The significant, albeit modest, negative correlation between vocabulary and attitude scores suggests that individuals with weaker vocabularies tend to have more favorable attitudes toward censorship than their counterparts with stronger vocabularies. On the other hand, comprehension as measured by the cloze tests suggests that attitude toward censorship had no effect on performance. Consequently, the directional questions relative to 1) subjects favoring censorship making higher scores on the pro-censorship cloze and 2) subjects opposing censorship making higher scores on the anti-censorship cloze were answered negatively. Therefore, it appears that bias did not affect comprehension. This conclusion is consistent with earlier findings of Spiro (1977), Sheppard (1980), and Read and Rosson (1982). These researchers all concluded that initial comprehension is unaffected by bias. On the other hand, they all found that delayed recall is substantially modified in the direction of preconceived attitudes as new information becomes integrated with the old. There is, of course, no reason to assume that cloze scores would be any different if readministered over time intervals. However, the intriguing conclusions reported by the researchers cited above suggest that recall of information contained in those articles would be biased to conform to what Read and Rosson called "belief consistent" (p. 241) behaviors.

Findings did not concur with suggestions proposed in the Matthewson (1985) model suggesting that a favorable attitude toward content should give rise to increased comprehension. Albeit the present study examined only

immediate comprehension based on performance on cloze measures.

Readability is indeed an imprecise area; nevertheless, cloze scores confirmed the predictions of the formulas used. Cloze scores, however, tended to be closer (4.5 percentage points difference in means) than the readability formulas suggested.

Conclusions

Overall analysis of data suggests that subjects with lower vocabularies tend to have more favorable attitudes toward censorship. On the other hand there appears to be no relationship between reading comprehension as measured by cloze tests and attitude toward the content of the message.

The results of this study provide groundwork for further empirical research concerning censorship. There is an abundance of philosophically based studies based on censorship and, of course, further establishment of theoretical base is a valid avenue for study. On the other hand, opponents of censorship also need to make greater efforts to understand characteristics of censors and would-be censors. This can be done only through even-handed research designed to determine factors contributing to attitudes favorable toward censorship. For example, findings in this study suggest that vocabulary enrichment programs might prove helpful.

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APPENDIX A

Censorship Scale Items

1. Librarians in elementary schools should remove books from circulation that they believe would be harmful to children if read by them.

2. Clergy (priests, ministers, rabbis, etc.) should not have the right to remove books from libraries even if those books are offensive to the people in their places of worship.

3. Books by Karl Marx should be banned from libraries because they glorify communism.

4. Books by convicted criminals serving time in prisons should not be banned from libraries even if the criminals will get rich from the sale of the books once they are released from prison.

5. Pornographic materials should be banned from all libraries and bookstores.

6. Teachers and school administrators should not be allowed to take books from students even if they believe the books contain information harmful to the students.

7. The production of pornographic books should be a serious crime and the authors and publishers should be imprisoned.

8. Faculty should not be allowed to prevent students from publishing articles in student newspapers.

9. Censorship boards made up of outstanding community members should have the power to ban books which they believe have dangerous content.

10. Public and school libraries should not be permitted to have books on sex education available for reading by people under 16 years of age.

11. Newspapers should report the articles of groups wanting to overthrow the government of the United States. This is true even if the activities might be appealing to people not now involved with the groups.

12. A newspaper should not report the last words of a convict about to be electrocuted if the convict said he was proud of the murder he committed and was glad he did it and that he thought of himself as a hero.

13. Advertisements for membership in the Klu Klux Klan should be permitted in high school and college newspapers.

14. The United States government should not be allowed to pass laws controlling advertising in children's newspapers.

15. Public and school libraries should not have books about drug use that can be checked out by children under 16 years of age.

16. Young people are helped in learning what is right and what is wrong when books with un-Christian ideas are kept from them.

17. Taxpayers pay for the books that libraries and schools purchase; therefore, taxpayers should have the right to determine which books are purchased and used by students.

18. Courts should not have the right to rule on whether or not books should be banned from the community.

19. Adults should not prevent teenagers from reading materials written by people who glorify lifestyles that are very disturbing to the adults.

20. A parent or group of parents should have the right to remove a book from a public library or public school curriculum if they find it offensive.

21. Books that describe how to commit crimes or how to destroy property should be banned.

22.* Students should not be required to enroll in a class if books are used which have ideas different from the students' religious (or moral) beliefs.

23. Books which say that the United States was wrong in its involvement in the Vietnam War should be banned because these books could make people feel angry toward their country.

24. A book should not be banned even if it says that the ancient Eskimo practice of sending old, helpless, people off to die by themselves in the snow is a good idea.

25. Librarians should be allowed to obtain every type of reading material because libraries are merely storage areas for books and should not limit what they hold.

* Item not used in scoring.

East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, TN